

Rep. Betty McCollum (D-Minn.), *The Hill Blog*

Nonprofit organizations play an important but little understood role in the U.S. economy. Almost 10 percent of the U.S. workforce is employed by the nonprofit sector, according to the Congressional Research Service. That's roughly the same number of Americans who work in the manufacturing sector. According to the Government Accountability Office, as much as 5 percent of the U.S. GDP was produced by the nonprofit sector.

Most importantly, the nonprofit sector is essential to a number of federal, state, and local government programs that serve millions of Americans every day. Without the complementary efforts of these organizations, the well-being of so many Americans would be at risk. Despite this tremendous significance, the federal government largely ignores the nonprofit sector.

Unlike the Small Business Association (SBA) - an official resource for all small businesses in the United States - no federal agency has ever been responsible for evaluating, building or maintaining the capacity of the nonprofit sector. Furthermore, no Congressional committee has jurisdiction over the sector as a whole. Nonprofits are the invisible sector in America's economy and often overlooked in Washington, DC on everything but tax policy.

The status quo needs to change, which is why I introduced the Nonprofit Sector and Community Solutions Act (H.R. 5533).

This legislation represents a significant step toward creating a more effective partnership between the federal government and the nonprofit sector. H.R. 5533 establishes a new United States Council on the Nonprofit Sector. The Council will be a forum for leaders of nonprofits, foundations, businesses and government to discuss strategies for strengthening the nonprofit sector. The bill also creates an Inter-agency Working Group on the Nonprofit Sector. This group will ensure that high-level representatives from cabinet agencies and other key agencies coordinate and improve federal policies pertaining to nonprofit organizations. Finally, the legislation directs Federal agencies to collect and publish better data on nonprofits AND to support research that will lead to smarter Federal policy.

The goals of the Nonprofit Sector and Community Solutions Act are to build a stronger nonprofit sector, craft smarter federal policy, and create more vibrant communities in every state across the country.